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SUBJECT: SUBJECT LINE

REF: MINSK 933

Classified By: Ambassador Political/Economic Section Chief Rebecca Dunham for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Lithuanian officials do not believe that Belarusian authorities were behind the death of Lithuanian diplomat Vytautas Pociunas. Pociunas, who worked as a security advisor to the Lithuanian consulate in Grodno, was found dead following a fall from the ninth-story window of an Inturist hotel in Brest August 23.

¶2. (S) Jonas Paslauskas, MFA's Americas Department Director and Lithuania's former Ambassador to Belarus, told us August 30 that he had spoken with Pociunas's equivalent number in Minsk, who had said that, initially, the case looked like an accident. Noting that he had stayed in the hotel himself, Paslauskas admitted that it was hard to understand how such an accident could have occurred. Officials have confirmed to us that Pociunas had been drinking the night of his death (Belarusian news had claimed that Pociunas had a blood alcohol level 4.75 times higher than the level at which one is considered legally drunk in Lithuania), although none has determined whether that contributed to his death. Our sources also tell us that the Belarusians have been fairly helpful in the investigation. That said, the GOL thinks that the GOB knows more about what went on than they are telling, although the Lithuanians do not expect the Belarusians to give them the full story anytime soon. Presidential foreign policy chief Valteris Baliukonis told the Ambassador September 1 that "we may never know what really happened."

¶3. (U) The Lithuanian press have covered the story intensively, publishing every theory, however unfounded. One newspaper alleged that Pociunas could have been drugged by prostitutes, while television news reported that stab wounds had been found on Pociunas's body. An article in the weekly "Veidas" alleges that Pociunas's death had to do with his investigation of impeached Lithuanian President Paksas's ties to an international network of smugglers. There have been numerous calls to establish a special parliamentary commission to investigate the case. The GOL has responded to the clamor with calm: the Foreign Minister pointedly told the press that the GOL had no plans to withdraw its diplomats from Belarus, and, in a press statement, Prime Minister Kirkilas emphasized the cooperation of Belarusian law enforcement in the investigation.

COMMENT

¶4. (S) Despite the sensational nature of the case, the GOL is trying to develop its information carefully before drawing any conclusions. They believe it will take time to unravel what happened. We agree that the GOB appears to be trying to help -- a Lithuanian prosecutor joined the investigation in Belarus the day after the death, and a Lithuanian forensics expert was granted permission to attend the Belarusian

examination of Pociunas's body. But when we have pressed our contacts on whether the GOB has shared its surveillance tapes (which we assume are de rigueur at an Inturist Hotel), their silence speaks volumes.

CLOUD